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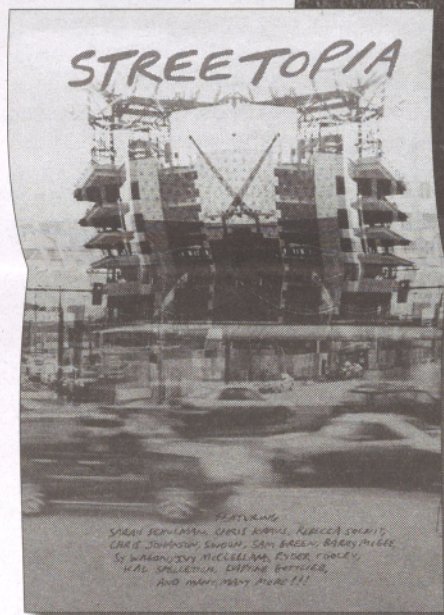


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Above: "Streetopia," edited by Erick Lyle, includes photographs and speeches from the 2012 San Francisco art fair Streetopia.

Top: Ryder Cooley performs at the Streetopia Free Cafe in San Francisco.

BY ANN-DERRICK GAILLOT
STAFF WRITER

In April 2011, when San Francisco risked losing one of its most valued residents, Twitter, to Silicon Valley, the city rolled out a new six-year payroll tax incentive to tech companies willing to make their homes in the Tenderloin or Mid-Market districts of the city. Twitter decided to stay, and soon companies such as Square, Uber and Spotify followed, flooding the once economically depressed Market Street. In the years since, the City by the Bay's unemployment rate steadily dropped and Google bus stops and Airbnb rentals started popping up. Meanwhile, rental prices surged and evictions in downtown San Francisco's once low-income neighborhoods became increasingly common.

While San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee and city officials were putting what is now known as the Twitter Tax Break into motion, local creatives Erick Lyle, Kal Spelletich and Chris Johanson were gathering fellow artists, writers and community organizers for an event that would unite Market and Tenderloin neighbors in imagining what they would like to see become of their neighborhoods, a possible utopia in place of the proposed "Dot-com corridor."

Streetopia, a five-week anti-gentrification art fair in 2012, was the result of their two years of planning and organizing. Each day featured free programming including dance and music performances, art installations, lectures and workshops, as well as free meals from The Free Cafe, a cooperative kitchen and popular meeting place at Streetopia's Market Street home base, The Luggage Store Gallery. In the end, Streetopia featured work from more than

Art in the face of gentrification

Erick Lyle, editor of 'Streetopia,' discusses the legacy of a five-week San Francisco art fair aimed at bringing a community together in the midst of increased displacement

100 artists and activists including Swoon, Barry McGee and Emory Douglas, all exploring what the Mid-Market area could be if determined by its residents instead of city officials and the tech companies they courted.

The legacy of Streetopia is memorialized in the documentary book "Streetopia," edited by Lyle and including photographs and speeches from Streetopia and essays about the event's impact. With writing from Rebecca Solnit, Chris Kraus and Sarah Schulman and interviews with Streetopia's participants, the book hums with the energy of the original art fair, whose ideas and discussions remain relevant to gentrifying city residents today.

Lyle spoke to Street Roots by phone from his home, now in Brooklyn, about Streetopia the show, "Streetopia" the book, and how artists and gentrification interact.

Ann-Derrick Gaillot: What went into the planning of Streetopia?

Erick Lyle: I had been pretty heavily involved in art and activism and music scenes in San Francisco, so I knew quite a few people and I had a sense of what kinds of things people could offer such a large-scale extravaganza. It was a very proactive focus. The idea was, what do we want it to be like, more than, what are we opposing.

A.G.: In your essay (in Streetopia), "Utopia in the Tenderloin," you write, "The Free Cafe would quietly become the most important part of the entire Streetopia show, the place where the show's very values were put to the test." Can you talk a bit more about its importance and how it put the show's values to the test?



"I understand the conditions in Portland are really difficult for housing right now, so I would hope that people would come and see the people around them and be encouraged by the DIY spirit and optimism of Streetopia."

ERICK LYLE,
EDITOR OF
'STREETOPIA'

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